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# The State of Black Omaha 1978

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# *The State of Black Omaha 1978*

Published by: THE URBAN LEAGUE OF NEBRASKA, INC.



## FOREWORD

The State of Black Omaha 1978 was the first of an ongoing series of annual reports to be published by the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc. Each report will appear during the first weeks of January.

The following sections of the present document were authored by Dr. Manuel Martinez, Director of Research and Development, Urban League of Nebraska, Inc.: Introduction and Parts I through IV. That author wishes to express his sincere appreciation to the numerous individuals who contributed to the development of these sections of the work.

The Recommendations section was authored by Mr. George Dean, Executive Director, Urban League of Nebraska, Inc. That author wishes to express his heartfelt appreciation to those who contributed to the development of the recommendations contained in this section.

The work was produced by Mr. Dean.

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## INTRODUCTION

In his State of Black America 1976 message, Vernon Jordan, National Urban League President, stated:

Black America is in a state of crisis. By any of the accepted indicators of progress -- employment, housing, education, etc. -- many of the gains blacks made over the past decade were either wiped out or badly eroded in 1975, and the portents for the future are not encouraging.<sup>1</sup>

In 1978, this statement holds no less true for Black Omaha than it did for Black America in 1976. All socio-economic indicators show that this segment of American Society is in a deep state of depression. Moreover, little concern has been evident on the part of local officials for reversing this state of affairs.

To gain an indication of the standing of the black population of this community, this report examines the areas of education, employment, welfare, housing, health and political representation as they hold for Blacks residing in this city. In each case, the standing's criterion employed is a comparison between the status of Omaha's Blacks on the one hand and Omaha's whites on the other. The standing of one group is considered compara-

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<sup>1</sup>The State of Black America 1976. Vernon Jordan. New York: The National Urban League, Inc., 1977

tively impaired if, in proportional terms, it is twice less favorable than the standing of the other. (Throughout this study, this assessment approach is referred to as the Criterion of Comparative Standings.)

As will become apparent, in every instance the status of Blacks compares unfavorably, to an alarming degree, with that of the white majority population.

This report consists of five (5) parts: Description of Omaha, Blacks in Omaha, the State of Black Omaha, Discussion, and Recommendations.

## I. DESCRIPTION OF OMAHA

Omaha, the largest City in Nebraska, is located on the East-Central part of the State, along the western bank of the Missouri River. The City, encompassing 78 square miles, has a population of 372,000. The Omaha Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), comprising Douglas and Sarpy Counties in Nebraska, to the west; and Pottawattamie County in Iowa, to the east, encompasses 1,458 square miles with a population of 558,746.<sup>1</sup>

The city dates back to 1825, when, following Lewis

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<sup>1</sup>Regional Housing Plan Technical Appendix Report No. 112-3, Vol. I. Omaha, NE: Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, 1973.

and Clark's 1804 conference with local Indians, Jean Pierre Cabanese set up a trading post on the city's present site. In 1846-47 the Mormons, on their way to Utah, spent the winter here, setting up the area's first settlement. In 1854, Indians ceded the present Douglas County to the United States. Omaha was officially incorporated as a city three years later.

Omaha has grown steadily from the time of its inception. Two major factors contributing to this steady growth have been the Union Pacific Railroad and Missouri River traffic, both of which have contributed significantly in making the city a major transportation and shipping center.

Today, Omaha forms one of the nation's larger meat-packing centers and is one of the nation's and the world's larger markets for livestock. It has a number of important food-processing plants, grain elevators and stockyards. Oil refineries, a lead smelter and factories manufacturing farm implements make up part of its diverse industry.

The Mutual of Omaha Insurance firm and Strategic Air Command Headquarters are located within the metropolitan area, as are the regional headquarters of the Farm Credit Administration and the Reconstruction Finance

Corporation.

Eleven (11) miles to the west lies Boystown, the flourishing youth community founded by Father Edward J. Flanagan in 1917.

In terms of the socio-economic standing of the majority of its residents, Omaha today is one of the more viable metropolitan areas in the nation. It was ranked 12th in family income among the nation's 50 largest cities.<sup>1</sup> (For 1978 median family income for this city is projected to be \$15,000.<sup>2</sup>) Furthermore, unemployment in Omaha in 1978 is projected to be 4%, as opposed to 6 - 7% for the rest of the nation.<sup>3</sup> A final indicator of the community's viability may be found in its crime incidence, which is a low 22,412; that of other major U.S. cities averages 35,239.<sup>4</sup>

It might be expected that such dynamic statistics would reflect upon the quality of life of all of the city's inhabitants; that Omaha, going by its high standing among the nation's major cities, would indeed reflect upon all its citizens the state's slogan, "The Good Life." But

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1977.

<sup>2</sup>Marketing Economic Guide. N.Y.: Marketing Economics Institute, 1977.

<sup>3</sup>Nebraska Department of Labor, 1977.

<sup>4</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1976.

such is not the case, as becomes manifest upon a view of the mind-boggling discrepancies in living conditions existing between the city's white majority and the city's black minority. Certainly, "The Good Life" has not come to black residents of Omaha as is readily apparent upon an examination of historical and current data.

## II. BLACKS IN OMAHA

Blacks began arriving in large numbers in Omaha from southern states around the turn of the century. By 1879 there were 789 Blacks living in the Omaha area. In the main, they worked as construction laborers with the Union Pacific Railroad, Burlington and Midland Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

Today, more than 40,000 Blacks reside in the SMSA, comprising 7 - 8% of the SMSA population. More than 34,800 Blacks reside within the incorporated city limits, comprising 9 - 10% of the incorporated city's population.<sup>2</sup>

Omaha black - white relations have been punctuated

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<sup>1</sup>The Negroes of Nebraska. Lincoln, NE: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940. Copyright: Omaha Urban League Community Center, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Regional Housing Plan Technical Appendix, Report No. 112-3, Vol. I. Omaha, NE: Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Planning Agency, 1973, p. 15. (Figures adjusted by MAPA for 1978.)



by a number of unhappy and turbulent events. One such occurrence took place on September 29, 1919, when Will Brown, a Black male alleged to have raped a white girl, was taken by a white mob from city jail and lynched. The man was hanged by the neck from a light pole in the downtown area, whereupon the mob opened fire upon the writhing body, riddling it with some 60 bullet holes. Presently, Brown's body was cut down; set on fire; and dragged, tied by a rope to the rear bumper of an automobile, through the city's main thoroughfares. During the lynching's early stages, then-Mayor Edward P. Smith attempted to intervene, crying, "I will not give up the Negro! I will give my life protecting the law!" He nearly did. He was seized by the mob, beaten to near unconsciousness and hanged. He was rescued by police before full strangulation had taken place, but not before the mob set one police car afire.

During the disturbance, another crowd, worked up to an apogee of frenzy, burned down the county court house building. A third crowd, equipped with firearms, marched upon the black residential area; blacks there were forced to resort to the use of gunfire to keep the mob at bay.

The full-scale riot was eventually quelled with the

assistance of 1,000 soldiers rushed in from nearby garrisons.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-eight (28) years earlier, another Black, James Smith, accused of having attacked a white woman, had been taken by a white mob from the city's jail and lynched.<sup>2</sup>

Racial disturbances erupted sporadically during the late sixties, when Blacks were demanding a stronger voice in the societal decision-making process.

### III. THE STATE OF BLACK OMAHA

Today, no signs of racial unrest are evident in the city. As a matter of fact, a recent city-wide survey conducted by a local commercial broadcasting station showed that race relations, as a perceived problem, ranks tenth, after such areas of preoccupation as recreation, transportation and city sewers.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one city official has boasted that "Omaha today is host to one of the neater, more law-abiding black ghettos in the country."

Yet, beneath a veneer of tranquility, portentous signs are discernible that in the area of comparative

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<sup>1</sup>The Omaha Daily News, Monday, September 29, 1919, p.1

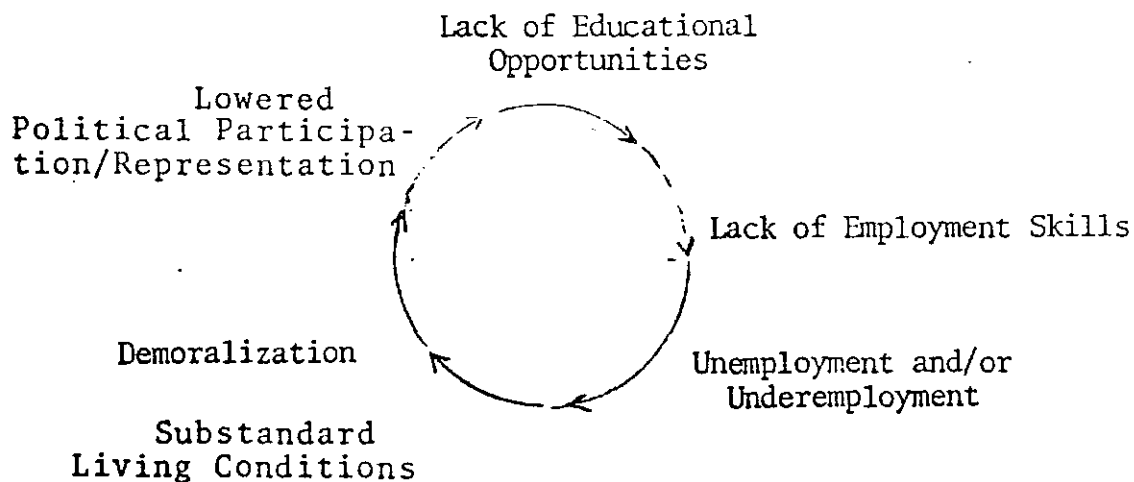
<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 5

<sup>3</sup>Omaha, NE: Chronicle Broadcasting Company (WOW-T), 1977.

racial standings, something is very much wrong in this city; that a pernicious and unchanging quality pervades the lives of Blacks residing here.

To gain a perspective from which to view the quality of life of Omaha's Blacks, it is well to refer to the work of sociologists M. Fantini and C. Weinstein. These workers proposed that a "cycle of despair" tends to develop among a people when its members are denied full mobility in such areas as education, employment, adequate living conditions and political participation. A strong, continuing deficiency in any of these areas can begin and/or perpetuate the cycle.<sup>1</sup>

This conceptualization, with some modifications, is illustrated below:



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<sup>1</sup>Fantini, M. and Weinstein, C. The Disadvantaged: A Challenge to Education. N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1968.

The net effect of the conditions associated with this cycle is two-faceted: (1) diminished participation in social, economic and political decision-making processes; and (2), decreased access to benefits derivable from the products of society.

As the analysis to follow shows, this phenomenon is today all too apparent within Omaha's Black community. Following is an examination of the facets of the cycle of dispair as they presently apply to Omaha's Black sector.

#### EDUCATION

In the areas of primary, secondary and post-secondary education, Black Omaha is in a crisis state.

The Omaha Public School System (OPS) consists of some 100 primary, "middle", and secondary schools with an enrollment of 53,527 pupils. The student racial composition is 22% Black; 75% White; and 3% Hispanic, Native American and Oriental.<sup>1</sup>

Until as recently as 1975, OPS was segregated. In that year, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the U.S. Department of Justice concerning a desegregation order issued earlier to OPS by that federal agency. OPS

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<sup>1</sup>Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey.  
Omaha Public School System Report, 1976-77 School Year.  
Omaha, NE: OPS, 1977.

has since then complied with the desegregation order, while at the same time vigorously appealing the court's current decision. To date, the appeal process has run up a legal bill in excess of \$300,000.

The resistance of OPS to desegregation is perhaps manifested in the disproportionate number of black students, integrated into the OPS, who were suspended from school for one or more days during the 1976-77 school year. During this time, 1,735 out of 11,831 black students were suspended. This figure represents 15% of the black student population. By contrast, only 1,990 out of 39,978 white students were suspended for one or more days during the same period.<sup>1</sup> This figure represents 4% of the white student population. (Note the 1:4 white-to-black suspension ratio between these two percentages.)

Given the obviously unfavorable atmosphere for Blacks extant in OPS, it is not surprising that fully 50% of Blacks currently eligible for primary and secondary education have dropped out of school altogether. By contrast, only 28% of whites currently eligible for school have done so.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Regional Housing Plan Technical Index Report No. 112-4, Vol. II. Omaha, NE: Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Planning Agency, 1975.

Of the total number of Black individuals 25 years of age and older, only 29% have completed high school. By contrast, approximately 60% of the majority population in the same age group have completed secondary schooling.<sup>1</sup>

These comparative figures concerning primary and secondary school are bleak indeed; those concerning post-secondary education are bleaker. Of eligible Blacks, only 7% have completed one to three years of college; only 3% have completed four or more years. By contrast, of eligible whites, 26% have completed one to three years of college and 13% have completed four or more years.<sup>2</sup> (Note the 4:1 ratio between these percentages for whites and blacks.)

Going by the criterion of comparative standings, in terms of educational opportunities Black Omaha is critically deficient. In this respect, one facet of the cycle-of-despair has clearly come into being for black residents of this city.

#### EMPLOYMENT

So has a second facet. Omaha's black labor force

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

consists of 16,623 individuals, of whom 2,691, or 17%, are officially unemployed.<sup>1</sup> It may be pointed out that this figure is based on the number of individuals who report to the State Labor Department as unemployed. The Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., recognizes that, for a variety of reasons, many unemployed Blacks do not report to an official agency. The number of such persons has been estimated to be slightly larger than the number of those who do report. The sum of these two figures is termed "the hidden unemployment index" (HUI). By use of the HUI, it is estimated that the actual unemployment rate among Blacks in this area is 35-40%.

For comparative purposes, although the HUI is obviously the more accurate measure, the official index may be employed. As previously noted, unemployment for whites in Omaha is officially 4%, or nearly half that of the national average, while that for Blacks is 17%. Thus officially, a 1:4.25 white-to-black unemployment percentage ratio exists in the city. (Note again the 1:4 white-to-black contrast.)

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<sup>1</sup>Annual Planning Report: FY 1978. Omaha, Lincoln, NE:  
Nebraska Department of Labor, Division of Employment,  
1977.

It would seem that to say that 17% of black Omahans are unemployed is to say that 83% are employed. And this inference might cause some to give a sigh of relief concerning the supposed 83% of blacks who work. However, such a view is misleading. First, when the hidden unemployment index is taken into account, it becomes clear that the black employment rate is not 83%, but 60-65%. Secondly, any consolation from the fact that, at least, a majority of eligible Blacks are employed, quickly disappears when the level of monetary remuneration for Black workers here is examined. The median income for a Black family of four in Omaha is \$7,500,<sup>1</sup> as opposed to \$15,000<sup>2</sup> for white Omahans.

Thus, it is not surprising that 42% of the Black Omaha population has been officially declared to be economically disadvantaged; only 9% of whites have been so declared. Here a 1:4.66 white-to-black ratio surfaces.<sup>3</sup> (Again, note the 1:4 contrast.)

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, as reported by CBS News Alumnae, 1978, p.736; figure for 1975, adjusted for inflation by ULoFN at the rate of 6% per year.

<sup>2</sup>Marketing Economics Guide. N.Y.: Marketing Economics Institute, 1977.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau.



The economic plight of Black Omahans is further highlighted by the number of Black welfare recipients in this city. Thirty (30%) percent of Blacks required some sort of welfare assistance in 1976-77, as opposed to 2.36% of whites.<sup>1</sup> The white-to-black percentage ratio here is 1:12.7.

Unemployment in Black Omaha is likely related to the already noted lack of educational opportunities that exist for Blacks in this city. Of 1,743 individuals referred by the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., to local employers in 1977, only 380 or 22% were hired. One major reason for this low success rate is surmised to be a low job-readiness level on the part of a large segment of this population. A comparison of job types most frequently requested by clients of the Urban League and corresponding job availability in the local employment market indicates that the supply of jobs requested by ULoFN clients does not meet the demand for such jobs in the Omaha area. For example, the work type most frequently requested by clients is that of general factory work. The average annual job openings in this area is 288 (projected through 1985.) In 1977, the number of persons applying with the Nebraska Job Service for this

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas County Social Services Statistical Report 1976-77. Omaha, NE: Douglas County Welfare Administration, 1977.

type of work was in excess of 1,214. Thus, a conservative 1:4.3 application-to-availability ratio exists for factory work. Clearly, the type of work requested most frequently by ULoFN clients is one which is not readily available to accommodate most applicants.

On the other hand, ULoFN clients are underqualified for those jobs available in sufficient numbers to accommodate most job applicants. For example, the average number of job openings in the professional, technical and managerial fields, projected through 1985, is 2,487.<sup>1</sup> In 1977, the active number of applicants for jobs in this area was 2,132, or 355 less than the number of available jobs. Few ULoFN clients were found to be qualified for these types of jobs during that year.

The high secondary school drop-out rate and low college-preparation rate among Black Omahans clearly reflects upon the low preparation level in these areas of employment.

In the area of employment, as in the area of education, the criterion of comparative standings shows a critical deficiency in the viability of Omaha's Black Community.

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<sup>1</sup>Employment Trends. Omaha, NE: Nebraska Job Service, 1977.

## HOUSING

In housing, too. In theory, the two cycle-of-despair facets of poor educational mobility and unemployment are expected to result in a lowering in the standard of living conditions. This prediction holds true for Omaha's Black citizens.

Approximately 95% of Omaha's Black residents are concentrated into an 8-square mile ghetto on the Northeast sector of the city. This is an area in which, as an average, 16 persons per square acre reside, as opposed to an average of .60 persons per square acre in the SMSA. The white-to-black person-per-square-acre ratio is 1:13.<sup>1</sup>

The already noted low economic viability of the Black community is reflected in the relatively low average-value of housing units in Northeast Omaha. This value is \$7,000, in contrast to \$28,000 for the white sector,<sup>2</sup> for a 4:1 white-to-black ratio. Thirty (30%) percent of all housing units in the area are deteriorated, as opposed to 9% of housing units in the white sector.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Regional Housing Plan Technical Appendix Report No. 112-3 Vol. I. Omaha, NE: Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, 1976.

<sup>2</sup>1976 ICES Population and Housing Estimates. Omaha, NE: Omaha City Planning Department, 1977.

<sup>3</sup>Regional Housing Plan Technical Appendix Report No. 112-3 Vol. I. Omaha, NE: Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, 1976. p. 59.

No relief for this slum-condition is in view. Presently, a major freeway thoroughfare is being planned for the city, to cut through the heart of the Black community. The exact trajectory of the freeway has not been made clear. This prospect, involving as it does the disruption of a large segment of the area's physical configuration; and being riddled as it is with uncertainty as to where this upheaval is likely to take place, is not conducive to commitment on the part of public or private housing developers to implement housing renewal programs in the area.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, housing demolition in some parts of the area continues at an unabated demolition-to-construction ratio of 5:1. At last count, over 2,500 usable vacant lots were going to waste in the Black city sector.<sup>1</sup>

Housing conditions are so poor in Black Omaha -- and hope for improvement so remote -- that in a recent city-wide survey conducted by city officials fully 43% of the city's Black residents expressed an urgent desire to leave the area.<sup>2</sup>

### HEALTH

To gain an indication of the quality of living conditions of a community, housing standards are only one set

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p.61

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p.60

of considerations to be taken into account. Matters concerning health also are important determinants of the quality of life of a people.

In the area of health, as in all other areas so far examined, the vitality of the Black Omaha community has already deteriorated beyond the critical point. The infant mortality rate for Omaha's Blacks is 31.5 per 1,000 births. For Omaha's whites, it is 13.9 per 1,000 births. This figure represents a white-to-black infant mortality proportion ratio of 1:2.27.

The national white-to-black birth death ratio, as alarming as it is, compares "favorably" with that of Omaha. At the national level, the Black infant mortality rate is 26.5 per 1,000 births. For whites it is 14.5. This represents a national white-to-black ratio of 1:1.83, as opposed to the local contrast of 1:2.27. It is interesting, and telling, to note that in this respect, Blacks at the local level fare worse than Blacks at the national level (31.5 rate for local Blacks vs 26.5 for Blacks nationally); while local whites fare slightly better than whites at the national level (13.9 rate for local whites as opposed to 14.5 for whites nationally).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha, NE: Health Planning Council of the Midlands, 1978.

These figures point to a basic problem attending the area of health services within Omaha's black community. According to the Health Planning Council of the Midlands (HPCM), at least two (2) factors seriously undermine participation in health-care programs on the part of the disadvantaged of this city:

Many HPCM residents have difficulty knowing where and how to access many health-related services. Distance from service centers can cause under-utilization of existing services ....(Furthermore), reluctance in requesting available service is often due to fear, uncertainty, or the inability to clarify concrete needs or previous fruitless attempts to locate the proper source of the appropriate service.<sup>1</sup>

This condition applies particularly to those who have been

medically disengaged from the health care system due to socio-economic, educational or ethnic barriers. (Italics added.)<sup>2</sup>

The above paragraphs form a too-accurate account of health-care accessibility in Black Omaha. According to the 1973 Housing Survey<sup>3</sup> the majority of the city's

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<sup>1</sup>Plan Development Committee Phase V & VI Report. Omaha, NE: Health Planning Council of the Midlands, 1976. p.18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>3</sup>Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Planning Agency, 1973, p.64

Black residents cited a definite need for more doctors and hospitals in the city's black sector.

In 1978, this need is yet to be met. No major health care facilities exist in the black ghetto, while hospitals of the city lie at distances not readily accessible to an area in which fully 45% of residents lack automobiles.\*1

Going by the criterion of comparative standings, in terms of housing and health services Black Omaha exists under crisis conditions. It is obvious that a third facet of the cycle of despair has closed in on this sector of the city.

#### POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

So have the fourth and fifth facets. According to Fantini and Weinstein,<sup>2</sup> demoralization and lowered political participation should be expected to follow upon the heels of low educational opportunities, high unemployment and substandard living conditions. This theoretical expectation has been realized within Omaha's black community.

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\*This figure compares unfavorably with that of the white sector, which is 15%. (The ratio here is 1:3.)

<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p.60

<sup>2</sup>Op cit.

During the May, 1977, general elections, of approximately 22,000 Blacks eligible to vote, only 2,000, or 11%, voted. By contrast, 45% of eligible white voters throughout the city did so. The white-to-black voter participation percentage ratio is 4:1.\* (Note once again the pervasive 4:1 ratio.)

In Omaha, only three elected Black officials are serving in office. Of these, two are occupying non-political (school board) positions. One is serving in a political (state senate) capacity.

The reasons for the low political participation record existing on the part of Black Omahans are not hard to find. Black non-participants queried by the Urban League gave the following reasons for their non-involvement in the political process:

- 1) "I did not think I was eligible to vote."
- 2) "I am not familiar with voting procedures and cannot bother to take the trouble to find out what they are."
- 3) "I have not seen anyone worth voting for."
- 4) "Voting is a lot of crud. You know it's not going to do us any good."
- 5) "Politicians are a bunch of crooked racists."

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\* Data compiled by the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., from public records.



For the most part, those responses point to a sense of despair concerning the socio-political decision-making process -- a fatalistic attitude traceable to a loss of confidence in the social system.

For practical purposes, effective political representation does not exist in Black Omaha. Worse, the overwhelming majority of Omaha's black citizens have dropped out of the political system. Thus, the final facets of the cycle of despair have become apparent within this city's black community: The final indicators appear that Black Omaha is, indeed, in a deep state of depression -- economically, politically, and spiritually.

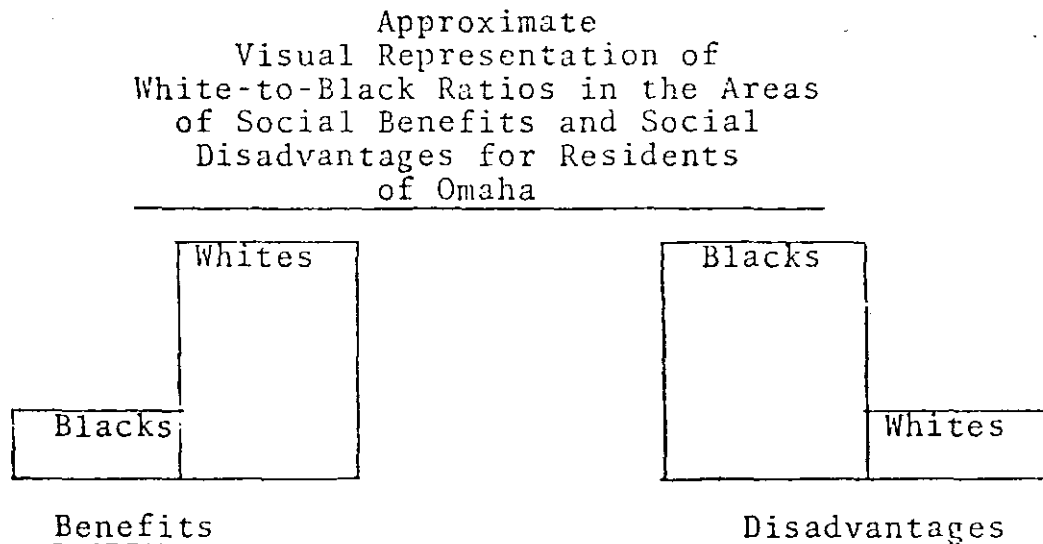
#### IV. DISCUSSION

The information analyzed indicates that the Black residents of this city are not reaping their share of benefits in the areas of education, employment, housing, health and political representation.\* For each of the areas examined, in all favorable instances, the proportion

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\*Interestingly, a recent survey conducted by the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., within Omaha's Black community showed that employment, political representation, education, housing and health services are among the six (6) most urgent problem areas concerning Black Omahans today.

of whites benefitting from the favorable condition is, as an average, at least four (4) times greater than the proportion of Blacks. On the other hand, in all unfavorable instances the proportion of Blacks suffering the brunt of the unfavorable condition is as an average, at least four (4) times greater than the proportion of whites. The following simple diagram gives an approximate visual representation of this state of affairs:



A net effect associated with this situation is a sense of despair on the part of the Black community, manifested in the comparatively high drop-out rates in the areas of education (60%), employment (17%) and political participation (90%).

Employing an adaptation of the cycle-of-despair concept of Fantini and Weinstein as a frame of reference from which to view the State of Black Omaha; and using the notion of the criterion of comparative standings to assess the status of Black Omahans in view of resources available in the city, the conclusion, based on data analyzed, is that Black Omaha is, for all intents and purposes, moribund.

In closing his State of Black America 1976 statement, Vernon Jordan wrote:

The implications of (the State of Black America) should not be lost on the American people, for the future of this nation is bound up in how it deals with these problems. To be remembered is that other societies have disintegrated when they ignored signs of spreading poverty and disenchantment among their people. It can happen in America but it does not have to. The hour is late but there is yet time to set the American house in order.

The hour is late in Omaha, particularly in view of the fact that Blacks here are becoming increasingly aware of (and discontented with) the disparity in the quality of life existing between the white Omaha sector (one of the more prosperous in the nation) and the Black Omaha sector (one of the more depressed in the nation.) The question must be raised: Given this tremendous disparity

and given the increasing level of black awareness, how long can the Black Omaha community be expected to continue to be "one of the neater, more law-abiding ghettos in the nation"? The racial disturbances of the 'sixties and the more recent activities in New York City during the Blackout of last July, should give an indication of the extent to which a people are willing to exist under conditions such as those afflicting this city's Black population.

Whether leaders in government and industry in this metropolitan area can effectively utilize what little time remains to set the Omahan house in order remains to be seen. Certainly, it is obvious that only through the most vigorous efforts on the part of these individuals, as well as on the part of the Black leadership, will life be infused into this sad and politically neglected segment of our city.

Like Mr. Jordan's previous documents, this report concludes with a number of recommendations that the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., strongly urges those in positions of trust to consider, in addressing the problems that have been identified.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### EDUCATION

- 1) An intensive program on the importance of remaining in school should begin immediately. This program should be formulated by Omaha Public Schools in cooperation with the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., and other community groups and leaders.
- 2) The OPS Board should stop all attempts to appeal the decision of the Eighth Circuit Court, as it pertains to the desegregation order, and begin devoting time and resources to insuring a quality education for all children in the district.
- 3) A Task Force should be established, composed of OPS personnel and community leaders, to study the problem of the high suspension, expulsion and drop-out rate of Black students. This Task Force would also be charged with providing solutions, including new and innovative approaches to discipline other than suspension.
- 4) A meaningful Affirmative Action Plan for OPS should be established that will insure the hiring and use of more minorities as counselors, administrators and principals, especially at the high school level.
- 5) A meaningful education program directed at all faculty and administrators in OPS should be implemented to familiarize these individuals with the cultural-psychological differences between white and Black students. This program would also serve the additional purpose of improving the attitudes of such individuals toward Black students.\*

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\* Such a program has been proposed and developed by Dr. Virgil Clift, of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Education. It is recommended that concerned individuals consult this program and lend it their support.

- 6) A Citizens' Task Force, appointed by the Board of Education, should be established to monitor the activities of school authorities in the area of curriculum development and the inclusion of Black students in extra curricula activities.
- 7) The development of a public school construction policy should be initiated that will promote and enhance the re-development of the Near Northside in conjunction with the efforts of other governmental agencies. This would also serve to reduce the disproportionate burden on Black students in the context of the present desegregation plan.
- 8) More Black parental involvement in the education process of their children. This should include their visiting the schools and meeting with faculty, involvement in PTA activities, participating in school Board meetings and constantly reminding the students of the importance of academic excellence.
- 9) A large-scale adult education program, designed to qualify Blacks to receive the GED should begin immediately. This should be done jointly by OPS, MTCC, UNO and Creighton in cooperation with community groups.
- 10) UNO, Creighton University and the College of St. Mary's should actively recruit Black students to enter their institutions. Funds should be earmarked specifically for Black students to enhance their registration, retention and graduation in these institutions of higher learning.
- 11) UNO, Creighton University, MTCC and the College of St. Mary's should design and assist with education programs for youth between the ages of 17-27 who are now unemployed. These programs should be technical and vocational in nature and should provide training which will lead to meaningful employment.
- 12) A strong Affirmative Action Plan on the part of each institution of higher learning to insure that there are more Black administrators and faculty members hired.

## EMPLOYMENT

- 13) A Full Employment Policy that would guarantee every Omahan a job who wants to work should be adopted as local policy. Such a policy would include commitment from both government and business that this would become a reality.
- 14) A new and sincere commitment to affirmative action should be adopted by government and business. This commitment should include meaningful goals and time-tables and a dedicated effort to insure that they are reached.
- 15) Effective utilization of federal manpower dollars in addressing the problems of Black unemployment in the Omaha area. This should include more involvement on the part of the minority community based organizations in operation of manpower programs.
- 16) A large-scale training program should be implemented to prepare unemployed Black Omahans for jobs projected to be available through the next decade. Funding for this type of program would come from both public and private funds.
- 17) A dedicated commitment on the part of government and industry that the high unemployment rate among Blacks in Omaha will be greatly reduced by the end of 1978.
- 18) A closer working relationship between the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce and minority businesses and community organizations in addressing the needs of the Black unemployed.
- 19) Closer scrutiny by government and business and industry to insure that their minimum requirements are not screening out qualifiable applicants.

## HOUSING

- 20) A real commitment on the part of local government in conjunction with private sector on re-developing the Near Northside. This would include the allocation of a greater proportion of Community Development

Block Grant funds to the Near Northside.

- 21) The immediate elimination of redlining as it pertains to the Near Northside.
- 22) A cooperative arrangement on the part of financial lending institutions should be implemented in order to make increased home loans available to Near Northside residents. This arrangement would reduce the financial risk of any one lending institution.
- 23) More involvement by the City of Omaha in the federally sponsored Homesteading Act in order to allow more individual home ownership for low and moderate income Blacks.
- 24) Provide incentives to private builders to invest in the re-development of the Near Northside.
- 25) Increased enforcement of City Codes to insure that absentee landlords are making their properties suitable for living.
- 26) Increased efforts of City Government in clearing off vacant lots. This could be done in cooperation with civic groups and community based organizations.
- 27) Make more money available for home improvements grants and loans for Near Northside homeowners.
- 28) Greater involvement on the part of community residents in the planning for the re-development of the Near Northside.
- 29) The promulgation of a policy by City Government, of restricting Near Northside displacement. (There is a growing belief that if and when the Near Northside is re-developed it will be re-developed after its present Black residents have been displaced.)

#### HEALTH

- 30) The number of health care facilities located on the Near Northside of Omaha should be increased.



- 31) Funds should be made available to insure that a program is implemented that will provide adequate pre-natal care to all expectant mothers. This will include wide-spread publicity on the importance of proper pre-natal care.
- 32) On-going health services should be established, that will address routine health problems of residents of the Near Northside. This could possibly be done through the use of mobile units equipped to treat minor ailments.
- 33) A massive immunization program that will enhance the possibility of all citizens being properly immunized.
- 34) More community education programs dealing with the importance of proper health. This could be done in cooperation with the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., the Medical Schools and other health service delivery agents.
- 35) A permanent Task Force be established to review and advocate for legislation concerning the implementation of health services for the Near Northside and to monitor the practices of major health services agencies in the city as they relate to Black Omahans.

#### POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

- 36) The immediate adoption of legislation calling for the election of City Councilpersons by district.
- 37) The appointment of Black citizens to all Boards and Commissions under the jurisdictions of City and County government.
- 38) Funds be made available for the establishment of an on-going program designed to stress the importance of Blacks participating in the political process. This could be done through the combined efforts of the two major political parties in cooperation with the Urban League of Nebraska, Inc., and other community groups.

- 39) In cooperation with the Election Commissioner's Office, an on-going voting registration drive be started on the Near Northside.
- 40) Voter Education Seminars be conducted on a regular basis throughout the year. This could be done through the combined efforts of the two major political parties, the League of Women Voters and other community groups.
- 41) An intense "get out the vote" campaign on each election day.
- 42) The establishment of a closer working relationship between persons in position of political leadership and the Black community. This will enhance the possibility of politicians being more sensitive to the needs of their Black constituents.

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